Extrinsic Emotion Regulation

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Abstract

To date, the field of emotion regulation (ER) has largely focused on intrinsic ER (i.e., regulation of one's own emotions) and has only recently started to investigate extrinsic ER (i.e., regulation of another person's emotions). This paper selectively reviews current findings in order to answer the following questions: (1) What is extrinsic ER and how can it be distinguished from related constructs such as emotional contagion, empathy, prosocial behavior and social support? (2) How can we best model the processes through which extrinsic ER occurs as well as individual differences in extrinsic ER ability? The answers show that although extrinsic ER has much in common with intrinsic ER, the two cannot be equated. Research is therefore needed on the extrinsic side of ER.

Keywords: emotion regulation, interpersonal emotion regulation, extrinsic emotion regulation, empathy, social support

Extrinsic Emotion Regulation

Imagine you have an important assignment. You feel anxious and irritated because you are uninspired and the deadline is looming. You try to regulate your emotions, but still worry. Fortunately, your partner arrives and manages to alleviate your negative emotions by taking you out for a walk and then helping you reappraise the current situation. As this example shows, other individuals play a key role in helping us regulate our emotions.

Emotion regulation (ER) has been defined as "the activation of a goal to modify the emotion-generative process, and involves the motivated recruitment of one or more processes to influence emotion generation" (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011, p. 767). In ER theory, regulation of one's own emotions is called *intrinsic ER*, whereas regulation of another person's emotions is called *extrinsic ER*¹ (Gross, 2015; Zaki & Williams, 2013). To date, the field of ER has largely focused on intrinsic ER, and only recently started to investigate extrinsic ER. In this paper, we take stock of what is known about extrinsic ER.

What is extrinsic ER? Definition and conceptual boundaries

Extrinsic ER may be defined as *an action performed with the goal of influencing another person's emotion trajectory; it can aim to decrease or increase either negative emotion or positive emotion*. This definition has three core features that distinguish it from other related constructs.

Core feature #1: The regulator must have the goal of influencing another person's emotion trajectory.

Regulation refers to attempts to modify mental states or behaviors to achieve a desired outcome (Tamir, 2016). It occurs through goal-setting, where the goal defines the desired outcome (Latham & Locke, 1991). With regard to ER, the concrete regulatory goal involves a desired emotional state. For instance, your best friend has failed an exam and you want to cheer him up. Thus, the activation of the goal of influencing an emotion trajectory is a central

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defining feature of ER (Gross, 2015). In the case of extrinsic ER, the regulator must aim to influence another person's emotion trajectory.

Core feature #1 distinguishes extrinsic ER from the interpersonal processes that occur without an ER goal. For example, *emotion contagion* is "a tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person's and, consequently, to converge emotionally" (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994, p. 5). This interpersonal process can happen without the activation of the ER goal on the part of the influencer, even though his/her emotion influences another person's emotion as a result. For example, if you arrive at your friend's house happy (not knowing that he failed his exam) and your happiness expression incidentally cheers him up, it is emotional contagion, not extrinsic ER.

This core feature also distinguishes extrinsic ER from constructs that are not primarily or always concerned with changing another person's emotions. *Empathy* is such a construct; it primarily concerns "observers' sharing and understanding targets' affective states" (Zaki, 2014, p. 1608). *Prosocial behavior*, referring to "voluntary, intentional behavior that results in benefits for another" (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987, p. 92), can be used to change another person's emotions, but not exclusively. It can also be performed for the sake of overall social welfare such as in the case of a donation (Sze, Gyurak, Goodkind, & Levenson, 2012). **Core feature #2: An extrinsic ER goal can either decrease or increase negative or**

positive emotions.

As in intrinsic ER, most previous studies of extrinsic ER have focused on the downregulation of negative emotions and up-regulation of positive emotions (hedonic motives: Zaki & Williams, 2013). However, a regulator may also up-regulate the regulatee's negative emotions (e.g., increase someone's anxiety) or down-regulate the regulatee's positive emotions (e.g., reduce someone's enthusiasm). Counter-hedonic extrinsic ER can aim to help the regulator obtain desirable outcomes by facilitating the regulatee's performance (instrumental motives; Netzer, Van Kleef, & Tamir, 2015; Nozaki & Koyasu, 2013), improve the regulatee's long-term well-being (altruistic motives; López-Pérez, Howells, & Gummerum, 2017), or disrupt the regulatee's pursuit of a goal for the regulator's benefit (antisocial motives; Zaki & Williams, 2013). For example, you have a group debating competition during a university class, but your groupmates seem in no hurry even though the competition is tomorrow. You may try to increase your groupmates' anxiety to make them focus on the task in order for you to get a good grade (instrumental motives), or for them to get good grades even if you do not need a good grade from this class (altruistic motives). You may also try to increase your competitors' irritation so you will get a relatively better grade by disrupting their concentration (antisocial motives).

Core feature #2 distinguishes extrinsic ER from constructs such as *social support*, referring to "a social network's provision of psychological and material resources intended to benefit an individual's ability to cope with stress" (Cohen, 2004, p. 676). Although social support can be used to perform extrinsic ER, it is principally for hedonic motives (i.e., to alleviate the regulatees' negative emotions and make them feel better). By contrast, extrinsic ER can include counter-hedonic actions. Thus, existing extrinsic ER scales include items such as "I can make someone feel anxious so that they will act in a particular way" (e.g., Austin & O'Donnell, 2013).

Core feature #3: The regulator must take action to influence the regulatee's emotion trajectory based on the extrinsic ER goal.

To be regarded as extrinsic ER, the regulator must act to influence the regulatee's emotion trajectory. Unlike intrinsic ER, the regulatee is a different person from the regulator; thus, to influence another person's emotion, it is not sufficient for the regulator to just imagine possible extrinsic ER actions. The regulator must implement actual action based on the extrinsic ER goal (Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009). This action can be verbal (e.g., suggesting an alternative interpretation of the situation, or expressing understanding of what the regulatee feels) or non-verbal (e.g., a hug or pat on the shoulders); it can target the regulatee directly (as in the aforementioned examples) or indirectly (e.g., if my sister is sad because my brother was mean to her, I can urge him to apologize in order to regulate her emotions); it can be explicit (often called effortful) or implicit (often called automatic; Gyurak, Gross, & Etkin, 2011). For example, repeated training can alter an explicit extrinsic ER to a more implicit one.

Core feature #3 also distinguishes extrinsic ER from *empathy*, because individuals feeling empathy do not necessarily carry out other-oriented behaviors (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). Of course, empathy can be a strong promoter of extrinsic ER, but it is not a sufficient condition to achieve extrinsic ER.

Modeling processes and sources of individual differences: The extended process model of extrinsic ER

Based on Reeck, Ames, and Ochsner (2016), we suggest that the process of extrinsic ER can be described by the extended process model, a widely used framework for intrinsic ER (Gross, 2015; see McRae and Gross, this issue, for a general description). This model considers emotion generation and ER as valuation systems that consist of four-step cycles world (W), perception (P), valuation (V), and action (A). ER represents a second-order valuation system because it takes the first-order emotion generation valuation system as its input and target of an action impulse (Gross, 2015). In the case of extrinsic ER, the input and target of the ER system is another person's emotion generation system (see Figure 1).

As in intrinsic ER, extrinsic ER is a multistage process where each stage comprises W-PVA cycles and triggers a subsequent stage (Figure 1), including the identification, selection, and implementation stages (Reeck et al., 2016). Moreover, individuals monitor these ER processes (Ford & Gross, 2018). The extended process model is particularly useful for helping researchers to clarify the sources of individual differences in extrinsic ER (see Gross & Jazaieri, 2014, for a review regarding intrinsic ER). We outline each stage below and selectively highlight relevant individual difference factors and potential failure points.



Regulator's extrinsic ER system

Figure 1. The extended process model of extrinsic emotion regulation. ER: emotion regulation, W: World, P: Perception, V: Valuation, and A: Action.

Identification stage

In this stage, the regulator perceives (P) another person's emotion (W) and evaluates (V) whether that emotion requires regulation. If so, the action impulse (A) is an ER goal. For example, your partner perceives (P) that you feel anxious and irritated because you have not

finished your assignment (W). Your partner evaluates (V) the necessity of regulating your emotions and activates an extrinsic ER goal to help you feel more relaxed (A). This ER goal triggers the selection stage.

An important failure point here is *inaccurate emotion perception*. Activation of the extrinsic ER system hinges on successfully identifying another person's emotion. Individuals with high emotional intelligence (alternatively labeled emotional competence) are more sensitive to another person's emotional expression (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). They are also more competent in inferring another person's emotional state from situational cues (Nozaki, 2015). In contrast, some psychopathological disorders, such as autism spectrum disorder, are associated with emotion perception deficits (Uljarevic & Hamilton, 2013).

Another important failure point is *inappropriate ER goal-setting*. During valuation (V), the regulator should appropriately consider the costs and benefits of maintaining versus regulating another person's emotion. This consideration is particularly meaningful in the case of counter-hedonic instrumental or altruistic extrinsic ER, because the regulator should appropriately weigh the utility of negative emotions. Individuals who recognize the utility of anger for an upcoming competitive task are more likely to induce anger in their partner to facilitate his/her performance (Netzer et al., 2015). Emotionally intelligent regulators are also more likely to set a counter-hedonic extrinsic ER goal when those regulators have instrumental motives (Nozaki & Koyasu, 2013).

Selection stage

In this stage, the regulator perceives (P) a variety of potential strategies that could influence the regulatee's emotion. To influence another person's emotion-generative system, five families of extrinsic ER strategies exist (Little, Kluemper, Nelson, & Gooty, 2012; Reeck et al., 2016) as for intrinsic ER (Gross, 1998); Appendix A provides descriptions and examples of each. Subsequently, the regulator evaluates (V) the costs and benefits of these

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strategies based on relevant world features. If a given strategy is evaluated as sufficiently desirable, the action (A) will be the selection of that strategy. For example, your partner perceives (P) various strategies to alleviate your emotions and evaluates (V) their costs and benefits. Then, your partner determines which strategy should be used (A) (e.g., distracting you from your assignment). This strategy triggers the implementation stage.

An important failure point of this stage is *unsuitable strategy choice*, because strategies vary in their effectiveness (Dixon-Gordon, Bernecker, & Christensen, 2015). For example, for regulating others' emotions, emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to use problem-solving (situation modification), distraction (attentional deployment), and reappraisal (cognitive change), which are known as effective ER strategies, and less likely to use expressive suppression (response modulation), which is known as an ineffective ER strategy (Little et al., 2012). Additionally, in the case of extrinsic ER, some strategies focusing on the regulatee's emotional responses (i.e., response modulation), such as showing understanding of their emotions and affectionate touch, are effective to alleviate the regulatees' negative emotions (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2017; López-Pérez, 2018; Pauw, Sauter, van Kleef, & Fischer, 2018). These strategies are more likely to be used by empathic individuals (e.g., Devoldre, Davis, Verhofstadt, & Buysse, 2010).

Moreover, a given strategy's effectiveness varies depending on situational demands and the regulatee's personality characteristics. For example, reappraisal, a representative strategy of cognitive change, does not work well to regulate intensely negative emotions (McRae, 2016; Sheppes & Gross, 2011) or emotions of individuals with low self-esteem (Marigold, Cavallo, Holmes, & Wood, 2014). Thus, the regulator must choose a tailored extrinsic ER strategy that fits the regulatee's needs. This requires successful self-other distinction for cognitive perspective-taking and careful assessment of the regulatee's needs, especially when the regulatee has a different personality or situation from the regulator 9

(Steinbeis, 2016). Empirically, individuals with a strong motive to critically evaluate the regulatee's needs are more likely to select tailored extrinsic ER strategies (Cavallo, Zee, & Higgins, 2016).

Implementation stage

In this stage, the regulator perceives (P) various ways of implementing a particular strategy (e.g., various ways of distracting you). Next, the regulator evaluates (V) these tactics' costs and benefits. If a given tactic is evaluated as sufficiently desirable, the system produces an action impulse (A) that implements this tactic. For example, your partner perceives (P) various tactics to distract you and evaluates (V) their costs and benefits for both parties. Your partner then determines which tactics will be used and implements them (A) (e.g., taking you for a walk).

Aside from *choice* of *unsuitable tactics*, as with the selection stage, an important ER failure point here is *unachieved implementation*. Even if the regulator selects an appropriate ER tactic for the regulatee, a certain amount of confidence is necessary to actually conduct this regulatory attempt (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). For example, you can identify that your best friend needs reappraisal but doubt your ability to provide an effective reappraisal suggestion. In this case, you may be reluctant to implement extrinsic ER. Individuals with high emotional intelligence have higher confidence in successfully conducting extrinsic ER, even when regulating emotions of another person with a dissimilar personality (Nozaki & Koyasu, 2015). Hence, they tend to implement extrinsic ER attempts more than counterparts with lower emotional intelligence (Cheung & Gardner, 2015; Nozaki, 2015).

Monitoring the extrinsic ER process

The regulator monitors the outcome of regulation and decides whether to maintain, switch, or stop current regulatory efforts. For instance, if going for a walk did not reduce your anxiety, your partner could choose another ER strategy, such as altering your cognitive appraisal of the situation by telling you that you have repeatedly shown the ability in the past to manage difficult assignments. When desired emotional states are achieved, the regulator stops extrinsic ER attempts.

An important ER failure point here is *premature stopping*: Even though the regulator could potentially change the regulatee's emotions by using another strategy or tactic, the regulator prematurely ends the regulatory attempt. Empirically, after a first failed attempt, individuals with high affective perspective taking (i.e., imaging other people's emotions from their point of view) are more likely to make a new different attempt to regulate other emotions, because they are better able to remain focused on the regulatee's need for positive emotions (Williams & Emich, 2014). In contrast, individuals who easily feel guilty about their failed attempt are less likely to make a new different attempt, because they are afraid of harming their relationship with the regulatee with more potentially unsuccessful regulatory attempts (Williams & Emich, 2014).

Concluding comments

The current review shows that extrinsic ER has much in common with intrinsic ER. For example, a core feature of the definition is the activation of a goal to influence the emotion trajectory. The underlying process can be depicted by the extended process model. However, these two cannot be equated. Extrinsic ER becomes complicated because another person has to be considered, who often has a different personality and situation. We hope this growing research field will illuminate a comprehensive picture of ER in interpersonal contexts.

Recommendations for Additional Reading

Marigold, D. C., Cavallo, J. V., Holmes, J. G., & Wood, J. V. (2014). You can't always give what you want: The challenge of providing social support to low self-esteem individuals. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 107, 56-80.

doi:10.1037/a0036554

This study shows that the effectiveness of extrinsic ER strategies varies according to the regulatees' traits (e.g., level of self-esteem), although the regulators do not always realize this.

Netzer, L., Van Kleef, G. A., & Tamir, M. (2015). Interpersonal instrumental emotion regulation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 58, 124–135. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2015.01.006

This study shows that individuals regulate other people's emotions not only for prosocial reasons but also based on instrumental motives.

- Niven, K., Totterdell, P., & Holman, D. (2009). A classification of controlled interpersonal affect regulation strategies. *Emotion*, *9*, 498–509. doi:10.1037/a0015962
 This article offers an original classification of various types of extrinsic ER strategies, including both affect-improving and affect-worsening strategies.
- Nozaki, Y. (2015). Emotional competence and extrinsic emotion regulation directed toward an ostracized person. *Emotion*, 15, 763–774. doi:10.1037/emo0000081
 This study illustrates several points at which individual differences emerge during the process of extrinsic ER.
- Reeck, C., Ames, D. R., & Ochsner, K. N. (2016). The social regulation of emotion: An integrative, cross-disciplinary model. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 20, 47–63. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2015.09.003

This article thoroughly reviews possible neural mechanisms underlying the process of extrinsic ER from the perspectives of both the regulator and the regulatee.

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Footnotes

¹Some researchers use the term "interpersonal emotion regulation" for regulation of another person's emotions (e.g., Niven, 2017). However, following Zaki and Williams (2013), we regard "interpersonal emotion regulation" as ER occurring within live social interactions and consisting of both intrinsic ER (an individual initiates social contact to regulate his/her own experience) and extrinsic ER (an individual tries to regulate another person's emotion).

Type of strategy	Examples	Step of the regulatee's emotion generation system targeted by each strategy
Situation selection	Encourage the regulatee to enter into a	A potentially emotionally
(selecting the situation to	situation that elicits desirable emotions	evocative external world
which the regulatee will be	Invite the regulatee to avoid the situation	(W)
exposed)	that elicits undesirable emotions	
Situation modification	Change the situation that elicits the	-
(changing aspects of the	regulatee's current emotions	
situation in order to modify	Invite the regulatee to change his/her	
the emotions that it elicits in	surrounding situation	
the regulatee)		
Attentional deployment	Distract the regulatee	Perception (P) of the
(influencing which portions of	Invite the regulatee to focus on some	current world
the world the regulatee	specific aspects of the emotion-eliciting	
perceives)	situation	
Cognitive change	Suggest a different interpretation of the	Valuation (V) of whether
(altering how the regulatee	situation	the perceived world is
cognitively	Help the regulatee to accept the situation	good, bad, or irrelevant
interprets/evaluates the world)		given the desired state of
		the world
Response modulation	Ask the regulatee to calm down	Emotional action impulse
(directly influencing the	Propose that the regulatee take a deep	itself (A)
regulatee's emotion-related	breath	
reactions)	Show an understanding of what the	
	regulatee feels	
	Hug, pat on the shoulders	

Appendix A. Five families of extrinsic emotion regulation strategies (with examples)